DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 324 663 CS 010 284

AUTHOR Rogers, Sue F.; Compton, M. Elizabeth

TITLE College Freshmen vs. Instructors: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Teaching in the Content Areas.

PUB DATE 89

NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the College Reading Association (Philadelphia, PA, November 3-5, 1989).

PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS *College Faculty; *College Freshmen; *Content Area Reading; Higher Education; *Interdisciplinary Approach; School Surveys; Student Attitudes; *Study Skills; Teacher Attitudes; *Writing Instruction

IDENTIFIERS Averett College VA

ABSTRACT

A survey assessed the accomplishments of the first required freshman interdisciplinary studies course at a small, private liberal arts college. In the fall of 1988, 12 instructors from 7 disciplines began teaching the course which included the teaching and application of reading, writing, and study skills. At the end of the 1988-89 academic year, two surveys were conducted, one of the 12 faculty and the other of the freshmen students who had taken the course. Surveys indicated that (1) faculty and students developed good working and personal relationships; (2) faculty and students believed the study skills portion of the course to be helpful; (3) faculty felt students profited the most from essay writing instruction; (4) students felt reading and highlighting notes and textbooks were the most beneficial skills; (5) instruction in time management was needed; (6) instruction in making study guides was needed; (7) knowledge and ability to function independently with encouragement and suggestions in forming their own study habits and thinking skills should be acquired by freshmen during the course; (8) a "spoon feeding" atmosphere should be avoided; and (9) more freshmen tend to drop out of college during the first semester than the second, and therefore, surveying those students would give information to advisors to help freshmen adjust better to college life. (An appendix includes the faculty and student surveys.) (SR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED324663

College Freshmen VS Instructors: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Teaching in the Content Areas

by

Sue F. Rogers, Ed.D. and M. Elizabeth Compton, Ph.D.,
Averett College

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

In the Fall of 1988, twelve instructors from seven disciplines--business, education, English, history, psychology, religion and theater arts and speech began teaching a required freshmen interdisciplinary content course which included the teaching and application of reading, writing and study skills. Classes met three hours per week during the Fall semester and carried three semester hours of academic credit toward a bachelor's degree. The faculty chose "The Vietman Era" as the topic for this first year's Interdisciplinary Studies course (IDS 101) theme.

The implemention of this course was a result of a year of planning involving freshmen faculty advisers who realized that more is needed by freshmen than good academic advising and teaching of content. Hence, freshmen advisors designed the IDS course, which was approved by the entire college faculty and endorsed by the college's provost and president. Both general faculty and administration support were essential as this course is included as one course of faculty members' contractual teaching loads and is part of the students' general education requirements for college graduation.

The reviewers of the literature for this study found one article by Sanoff et. al. that supported the beliefs of the Averett faculty who planned the IDS 101 course. The authors of the article (*U.S.News and World Report*, April 17, 1989) contended that the stress associated with adjustment to college expectations was overwhelming to freshmen. In fact, the authors noted that college counselors reported students frequently did poorly in required courses for majors and careers in order to escape another stress--high parental expectations! The counselors found that students

CS010284

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sue Rogers

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

help to put quality back into their studies as well as into their campus living. When planning the IDS 101 course freshman faculty advisors had noted similar types of stresses among freshmen at Averett College--a small, private, liberal arts college in Danville, Virginia. Other stresses that the faculty discovered were poor GPA's, difficulties with time-management, lack of goals for college, erratic study habits, too much socializing, lack of compassion for their fellow man, lack of interest in their own personal cultural development, poorly defined thinking processes for decision making and a general lack of understanding of themselves and of what constitutes a college education. Obviously, faculty advisors were frustrated in trying to find ways to address this myriad of problems.

Deciding what to include in the course meant spending hours in discussions; all advisors had input and all input was considered viable, regardless of the academic discipline represented by the faculty member. When faculty suggested strategies/activities to include in the course, s/he explained how to implement and evaluate the results. Thus, the following reading, writing and study skills became part of the course syllabus; these were all in addition to or part of the course's regular content assignments:

- essay writing
- journal writing
- learning styles
- lecture notetaking
- library skills
- oral expression
- outlines (on lectures and readings)
- reading notes
- test taking and studying skills
- time management
- values classification
- vocabulary notes

The content portion of the course included a ninety minute session once a week for the entire freshmen class to hear

guest speakers such as the former U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam, a University of Virginia professor--an authority on the Vietnamese culture or one of Averett's professors whose specialty areas/interests were in the topic of study for that week such as geography, economics and political science. Required readings included a text, *The Vietnam War: Opposing Viewpoints* by David L. Bender (1984), giving opposing viewpoints on each topic discussed, a novel, *In Country*, by Bobbie A. Mason, and other supplementary articles and essays. The other ninety minute class session each week consisted of small group (10-14 students) discussions with the academic faculty advisor. These discussions centered around teaching reading, writing and study skills. The advisors attempted to teach the study skills within the context of the academic assignments,i.e. writing papers, participating in clas discussions and sharing ideas from reading and listening to lectures. The first two weeks of the semester the students had only small group sessions (no lectures) to work on basic study skills--notetaking, goal setting, time management, journal writing and other areas of need.

Beginning in September, the student response to the course was to revolt! However, one objective was definitely met--the freshmen class bonded, even if it was to revolt against the course. The students wrote and signed two petitions forwarded to the Assistant Academic Dean to stop the course and/or alter the requirements. Their major complaints were: too much homework, too much emphasis on study skills and too little independence (their term was "spoonfeeding"). However, students made it clear they liked their faculty advisors as well as their instructors in other classes. In addition to working together in revolting and complaining, they worked/studied together and matured personally and academically; hence, most completed the course successfully in December.

Another important motivator for the faculty occurred throughout the semester--not one parent complained about the course or the amount of work their son/daughter had to do for the course! Perhaps this was a result of parent

orientation in September. Soon after the parents arrived on campus with their son or daughter, each advisor met with his/her students' parents in a group meeting. During this one hour meeting the course was explained. Approximately seven weeks later at Parents' Weekend, the advisers met with them again to discuss the problems and advantages noted in the course as well as to listen to parental difficulties and stresses such as concern over grades. Parents expressed appreciation for these two sessions, several wanted to have individual conferences concerning their child's special problems or needs after each meeting.

To assess the accomplishments of the first IDS 101 course, both students and faculty completed surveys at the end of the 1988-89 academic year. The conclusions were to be incorporated into the plans for the Fall, 1989 IDS 101 course. A description of the two surveys, the results and implications for the Fall, 1989 course follow.

Survey I--Students

A survey for assessing effects in reading, writing, study skills and habits among freshmen was developed and given to all Fall, 1988 freshmen enrolled in the May, 1989 summer session, which included approximately ten percent of the original IDS 101 class. Some of the survey questions were based on a study conducted by Frank Kristine (1985) in his freshman chemistry class experiment several years earlier. He found students did not appear to know what to do once the class period ended--they lacked a daily pattern of studying and utilizing information they had on hand--mainly lecture notes and textbook materials. He stated that students expected to increase their study time in college as asignments increased and not because they were learning independently (students were unaware that learning independently took more time). His students needed to learn how to learn! Hence, a number of questions on the Averett survey (see appendix A) dealt with students daily study and thinking patterns.

The other aspect of Kristine's study (1985) included in the survey questions was the freshmen perceptions of their college instructors. Kristine found student--instructor relationships appeared to be adversarial since students assumed that instructor duties were to determine good vs bad students. Thus, he thought students were continuously trying to second guess what instructors wanted rather than to accept instructors' roles as those of facilitators of learning. He wanted students to have ownership of part of the class--to know they had helped make up some of the studying/learning rules in order to develop an atmosphere of cooperation between students and instructors.

The survey that the students at Averett completed indicate some agreement with Kristine's conclusions. In general, responses on the students' Survey I were:

1. Most students developed their current study patterns during the second semester of the freshmen year--the semester following the IDS course

2. More that one-third of the respondents indicated that they did not have a set pattern for studying by the end of the freshmen year.

3. The most important change in college study habits was an increase in study time

4. The most important study habits included in the course that students identified (in descending order of importance) were:
    a. reading assignments
    b. reviewing material before tests
    c. highlighting text
    d. highlighting notes
    e. outline/reviewing notes

5. Students seemed to be very much aware of study schedules, completing assignments on time, studying prior to tests, keeping to a study schedule and allowing for more time to study

6. Students felt instructors were helpful in and out of class

7. Students wanted study guides from instructors

8. Generally students felt comfortable with writing assignments, though many experienced feelings of inadequacy when required to use proper grammar in written assignments.

Survey II: Faculty Advisors

A survey to assess faculty advisor opinions concerning effects of the IDS course on freshmen's reading, writing, study skills and habits was developed and given to the twelve Fall, 1988 freshmen IDS instructors during the May, 1989 summer session. Of the twelve, seven were returned or approximately fifty-eight percent. Some questions were similar to those in the student survey, such as identifying the most important study skills students acquired during the course. In addition the instructors were asked to give reasons for their responses. Other questions the survey included concerned GPAs (grade point averages) of their advisees at the end of the first and second semesters of the freshman year, retention and student-faculty relationships.

Two questions on the faculty survey concerned the rewards and frustratons of teaching this course and of advising freshmen. Margaret Bauch and Ceil Fillenworth, after completing a study in 1985, found faculty working together in two special courses combining study skills and a content course needed to feel that their colleagues' administrators appreciated their efforts. The also concluded that a faculty that is people oriented was needed for teaching the combined course to freshmen. Averett definitely found this to be true of its freshmen faculty advisors' personalities.

The instructor responses to Survey II offered both similarities and contrasts to the students' Survey I

results. Responses offered revealing information for the advisors on grades, retention and other issues. The results of Survey II were:

1. GPAs appeared to be somewhat lower during the second semester--after the IDS course semester

2. Dropouts numbers were higher at the end of the Fall, 1988 semester than at the end of Spring, 1989 semester

3. Freshmen remaining throughout the entire freshmen year preregistered for the Fall, 1989 semester indicating their intention to return to Averett for their second year. Thus, retention seemed to show improvement.

4. Based on performance throughout the IDS course, faculty cited improvements in writing as the most important skill developed

5. Student-faculty/advisor relationships appeared to be positive.

6. Faculty viewed the following tenets of the course as the most frustrating:
    a. motivation
    b. teaching study skills
    c. scheduling enough time for course work, especially grading

7. The most important rewards for teaching this course were:
    a. working with freshmen
    b. interaction with the other faculty advisors

Conclusions

Conclusions of Survey I completed by IDS students and of Survey II completed by IDS faculty advisors were:

1. IDS faculty and students developed good working and personal relationships

2. IDS faculty and students believed the study skills portion of the course to be helpful

3. Faculty felt students profited the most from essay writing instruction, requiring active production of student knowledge

4. Students felt reading and highlighting their notes and textbooks were the most beneficial skills, these requiring usage of their passive receptive skills

5. Instruction in time management for studying and completing assignments was needed

6. Instruction in making study guides was needed

7. Knowledge and ability to function independently with encouragement and suggestions in forming their own study habits and thinking skills should be acquired by freshmen during the IDS course

8. A "spoon feeding" atmosphere should be avoided by instructors

9. More freshmen tended to dropout of college during the first semester than the second; perhaps surveying those students would give information to advisors to enable freshmen to better adjust to college life before the drastic action of dropping out is undertaken

Implications for the Fall, 1989 IDS course

Based on the conclusions these suggestions regarding study skills were made to the IDS course planning committee for Fall, 1989:

1. Continue maintaining the close faculty-student relationships by being helpful and by being there when needed. Perhaps, this can be fostered by

invitations for office visits, frequent conversations with students and in general, by letting them know their company in enjoyable

2. Teach students reading and lecture notetaking skills early in the semester having them do meaningful assignments such as writing test questions on their notes and readings each week. They can use these for study guides and instructors may use them when making out tests

3. Continue requiring essay writing, giving students very specific instructions on how to write essays

4. Continue giving some instruction in time management, perhaps after the first test when students may see a need for analyzing their studying and socializing patterns and giving them the opportunity to modify their schedules according to individual needs. This activity is intended to increase students' self-esteems as they analyze their problems, decide on solutions and try to implement them--forcing them to become more independent and responsible. Not having to enforce students' study habits should alleviate some frustrations and work loads of instructors.

These changes are designed to enable freshmen to make their own decisions which may help to enhance their self-esteem and feelings of self respect and independence. At the same time, they will be improving reading, writing and study patterns.

In addition, the faculty advisors should continue to have planning meetings, socials and occasional workshops to maintain close working and social relationships. Since these instructors are people-oriented and receive their rewards from working with freshmen and with each other, their socializing together as a special group of faculty is very motivating. At meetings and workshops, stress topics

should be discussed and team efforts utilized to resolve these frustrations.

Designing and implementing an interdisciplinary freshmen content and study skills course was a unique experience for a team of freshmen faculty advisors at Averett College. Success and failures and caring about each other and students were all part of the course. Using the above suggestions taken from students and faculty surveys, the course in the Fall, 1989 semester is expected to be more satisfying for both students and faculty. Many difficulties of the first year should be alleviated as new ones are tackled with the arrival of a new class of first year college students.

REFERENCES

Bender, David L. (1984). *The Vietnwm War: Opposing Viewpoints.* St. Paul: Greenhaven Press, Inc.

Kristine, Frank J. (1985). Developing Study Skills; More Than a Handout. *College Teaching*, 33, p. 84-87.

Mason, Bobbie Ann (1985). *In Country.* New York: Harper and Row.

Rauch, Margaret and Fillenworth, Ceil (1985). Paired Courses: One Method for Enhancing Academic Success. Paper presented at the Minnesota Post Secondary Reading Council's State Conference (White Bear Lake, Mn.), April 20, 1985, pp. 1-29.

Sanoff, A. P., Glastris, Ellis-Simons, Pamela and Rachlin, J. (1989). The Freshman Year: Unkind, Ungentle. *U.S. News and World Report*, April 17, 00. 56-58.

APPENDIX

IDS--Fall, 1988

End of Year Student
Survey, May, 1989

1. Do you have a daily study pattern or time for reviewing or completing homework?

2. Is your study pattern the same as it was in high school?

3. Did your study pattern develop or change during the first semester? or second semester?

4. What change in your study habits was the most important during your freshmen year?

5. Do your study habits include; (check all that apply)
   Highlighting your notes
   Highlighting the text
   Outlining/rewriting notes
   Keeping vocabulary lists
   Reading textbook assignments
   Reading other assignments
   Weekly review of course work
   Review course work before test

6. Generally speaking, do you complete assignments:
   On time
   Ahead of schedule
   Late

7. Are you satisfied with your current study habits?

8. What is your best study habit?

9. How long have you utilized this (#8) study habit?

10. In your opinion, what do you most need to do to improve your study habits?

11. Do your instructors give tips on how to study for their courses?

12. Do your instructors give tips on how to study for their tests?

13. Generally speaking, do you follow your instructors' tips on studying?

14. Do you seek imstructors help outside of class?
    Regularly
    Sometimes
    Rarely

15. In your opinion, what could your instructors do to help you the most to achieve success in your classes?

16. Do many of your tests seem tricky or different from what you were expecting?

17. If yes to #16, how?

18. Do your instructors give clear illustrations on completing written assignments?

19. Generally speaking, do you feel comfortable completing written assignments?

Survey II

IDS Faculty Survey, May, 1989

1. How many freshman IDS advisees did you have after September 15, 1988?

2. The number of your freshman advisees with GPAs equal to or above 2.0 is:

	Above 2.0	Below 2.0
Fall, 1988		
Spring, 1989		

3. The number of your freshman advisees preregistered for Fall, 1989?

4. In your opinion, what 3 skills were most valuable to your advisees? Prioritize with designations of 1-3 and document (if possible) your reasons for this prioritization.

Lecture Notetaking
Reading Notetaking
Vocabulary Development
Time Management
Journal Writing
Essay Writing
Self Analysis Styles
Self Analysis of Test Taking Skills
Not any of the Above
Other

5. Would you like to add another study skill to the IDS course?

6. Please check the appropriate response:

   A. Students discussed personal problems with me?
      Often
      Sometimes
      Rarely

   B. Students sought my help with IDS and/or other courses:
      Often
      Sometimes
      Rarely

7. As a result of teaching study skills in IDS, did you change your teaching style within your other courses? Yes/No (circle one) If so, how?

8. What were your frustrations when teaching IDS?

   Scheduling/time factor
   Grading
   Motivating Students
   Students' inability to understand content/study concepts
   Covering content material
   Teaching study skills
   Other:

9. The 2 top rewards (prioritize 1-2) for teaching IDS for teaching IDS were:

   Not any
   Working closely with other IDS faculty
   IDS faculty workshop
   IDS faculty socials
   Working closely with freshmen
   Getting to know freshmen parents
   Teaching/studying the content on Vietnam
   Observing growth of freshmen
   Other